

CUSP OF OBLIVION HAYDEN CHISHOLM
CD SET (13 CDs) MOONTOWER FOUNDATION
RELEASE: MARCH 23 2016 - PRESS RELEASE

As for Hayden Chisholm's sax solos, I feel I should disapprove on behalf of wordsmiths everywhere. The words are entirely missing! But that fluid sound also seems to be a crucial part of what is going on. It knows about the stuff beneath semantics. It lifts and slips and slides, prefiguring and predicting, working with an alphabet that is both before words and beyond them.
Bill Manhire- Poet, 2015

Only three years after the release of his first magnum opus *13 Views of the Heart's Cargo*, Hayden Chisholm returns with another formidable collection of his music in the form of a 13CD set entitled *Cusp of Oblivion*. The recordings in this collection feature more than 50 outstanding musicians from the European jazz and improvised music scene and encompass works of Chisholm's recorded mainly in 2015. Four of the recordings were made as co-productions with Deutschlandfunk Radio and one of them with Swiss Radio. The scope of styles and forms is immense but the thread of the saxophone of Chisholm binds this wonderful collage together. In the words of critic Dan McClenaghan:

Noticeable in the first thirty seconds of the disc's opener is Hayden's tone on alto sax, perhaps the clearest, purist sound of any saxophonist out there today, rivaling—perhaps surpassing—that of one of Duke Ellington's main alto men, Johnny Hodges... the music has a cerebral yet approachable and uncluttered beauty.

And it is indeed the sound of his saxophone and the subtle blends of his compositional textures that make this collection something truly unique- a perfect amalgamation of vision, sound, execution, and production.

MT14 *Cusp of Oblivion* Hayden Chisholm Quintet

The first disc in the collection was recorded in Hayden's studio of choice, the old East German radio halls in Berlin- Studio P4. The compositions were all completed in the summer of 2015 and written for this exact Quintet. Drummer John Hollenbeck and Hayden had already collaborated on the exquisite recording *Monosuite* by Jürgen Friedrich as well as recording a still unreleased duo CD. Pianist Kaufmann and Chisholm had toured extensively with the Quartet *Melanoia* and first collaborated together in Cologne as early as 1995. The young Greek vibraphone player Evi Filippou is featured on the *Blowslap* album in the set and the Swedish bassist Eldh can be heard on 3 discs in the set. Together as a quintet, the level of timbal interweaving and interplay is something precious to behold. The compositions of the leader occupy the delicate no man's land between harmony and dissonance, there is so much of the human condition in our modern times to be found within. The fact that the collection's name is the name of the last composition on this album hints that there something of importance for the saxophonist hidden inside.

MT15 *Music for the Film Sisyphus Runs* Hayden Chisholm

In late 2015, Hayden completed his first short film *Sisyphus Runs*. In the past he had written music for several films of the artist Rebecca Horn however this was his debut behind the camera. The story of Sisyphus is taken into the mountains and the running action and

unfolding mythology are subtly supported by a soundtrack composed in 2014. The otherworldly mix of prepared piano, taiko drums, electronics and guitar give pace and grace to the 25 minute short film. This disc contains also several extra tracks unused in the final cut. In his own words: "This is a story that combines two passions of mine- mythology and mountain running. Although at the of production all kinds of events happened that completely turned my shooting plans on their head I still managed to thread together the story I'd been carrying in my head for a good year. Once finished, I literally collapsed- I'd managed to completely empty myself- it felt just like finishing an ultra marathon with my body and mind".

MT16 *The Void Between Us* Hayden Chisholm Trio

This trio outing is the first of the four co-productions with Deutschlandfunk Radio featured in the set. On it, the deft-handed rhythm section of Cologne based drummer Jonas Burgwinkel and Swedish bassist Petter Eldh provide a perfect antithesis to the soaring, weaving saxophone lines. The compositions strike me as extremely open and flexible in their forms and the warm sound of the huge Radio Chamber Music Hall is a perfect backdrop for the wonderfully nuanced dynamic range of the trio, a range in which the softest pianissimo carries with it an enormous intensity and punch. Between the listener and this music at least there is a sense of precious intimacy, there is no void whatsoever.

MT17 *Finn Again Wakes* Chisholm reads from Joyce

Chisholm has a long history of working with texts James Joyce and had created several *Ulysses* reading and music events in Cologne over the years. This is the first time, however, that he tackles the final work of Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, and the results are sublime. Together with Philip Zoubek on prepared piano, he leads us through this dreamlike text with song, humor, overtones, improvisation, chanting, dreamlike melodies- all of which Joyce perhaps would have relished, being a musician in his own right. The texts come alive as he dives through the book and reads at random, improvising as he goes in the true spirit of jazz within the multilayered textures of Zoubek's prepared piano.

MT18 *Temptation* Chisholm - Avramovic - Penman - Rückert

With a sweet collection of songs grafted from the heart of the Jazz canon, this album features the lyrical alto of Chisholm set to the timeless Hammond B3 of Avramovic. Again recorded in the old radio hall in Berlin, the sound of the outing, recorded by Avramovic himself, is classic in every regard. Penman and Rückert as a rhythm section are not without reason regarded as one of the very finest in contemporary Jazz and on this date they are swinging hard. Chisholm's arrangements are quirky, succinct, and full of humor. His alto never sails too high above the band; restraint, band sound, humor, and intense swing rule throughout.

MT19 *Glowing Core* Music for Rebecca Horn Films and Installations by Hayden Chisholm

Over the last 15 years Chisholm has collaborated intensively with the seminal German artist Rebecca Horn. His work with her is far reaching and includes scores for her films, installation music, and even a role as assistant director as she staged Sciarrino's opera *Luci mie Traditrici* at the prestigious Salzburger Festspiele. This album includes his score for her silent film *Fata Morgana* which was premiered at the Venice Biennale in 2008. The installation music for the large kinetic sculpture *Universe in a Pearl* was premiered in the Gropius Bau Museum in Berlin in 2006 and has since toured the world. The work *Glowing Core* was created by Horn and Chisholm in the enormous open space of in La Llonga in Palma de Mallorca in 2015. During the

6 month duration of the piece, almost one million visitors were able to experience Chisholm's sound installation accompanying the large sculptures of Horn.

MT20 Blowslap Hayden Chisholm and Evi Filippou

Chisholm and Filippou first collaborated in the village of Agios Lavrentios in Greece where Hayden has taught a saxophone masterclass since over a decade. The young Greek percussionist Filippou already displays prodigious skills on vibraphone, marimba, and percussion not only as an interpreter but also as a fine improviser. The pieces themselves are incredibly varied and allow us to experience the full range of classical percussion instrumentarium set in an experimental context next to the saxophone of Chisholm. The duo performed extensively in 2015 and also present two pieces recorded in the Abbey de Noirlac in France during a residency. The other works were all recorded in the chamber music hall of Deutschlandfunk in Cologne as co-productions with Deutschlandfunk radio.

MT21 Cassiopeian Slowdance Chisholm - Schmickler - Zoubek

Chisholm and Schmickler have a long history of collaboration dating back to the mid-90's. Together they have toured and recorded with Schmickler's *Pluramon* and as a duo they have released the album *Amazing Daze*. The last track on this CD *Miles* was originally a *Pluramon* production. The main work presented is a trio with the addition of Austrian pianist Philip Zoubek who contributes a huge and nuanced vocabulary of prepared piano timbres to the group. The result is a long and gradually developing work in which each of the three blend their respective sounds to forge a composition-in-the-moment of impressive form and poise. The title itself is indicative of the piece's speed and the meticulous geometry of sound forged by the trio have intense effects on the listener. This is a live document of the Trio's debut concert in Cologne during Hayden's annual *Plushmusic* Festival.

MT22 Ace of My Heart Lucerne Big Band and Hayden Chisholm feat. Lucia Cadotsch

Chisholm's first work for the Lucerne Jazz Orchestra *Mute Density* was a radical one stretching the bounds of the possible for big band- a microtonal odyssey using experimental notation, clusters, and extended instrumental techniques. For his second composition for the band he completely turns the table and presents an album of classic swing with a series of songs written for the band with Lucia Cadotsch as lead vocalist. The songs themselves had first been refined in a small group with Chisholm on clarinet and Bruno Müller on guitar, yet to be released on *Nonplace*. Chisholm felt ready in 2014 to try his hand at traditional arranging and surprises with a startlingly fresh take of the classic big band form. The lyrics rest precariously between quaint innocence and irony but the composer asserts it is only the former. The recording is a co-production with Swiss Radio.

MT23 Transitioning Alpha Theta Hayden Chisholm

This work for four alto saxophones is a continuation of Hayden's long obsession with the manifestation of the Fibonacci series in sound and particularly in the overtones series. The first important work of his *Love in Numbers* was the title of the first CD on his first box set and is powerful enough to speak on its own, even without the long essay explaining the composition contained in the liner notes. It was his intense work with the 13th overtone in the harmonic series that inspired him to make 13 his "lucky number" for these sets. This new work is still based on the Fibonacci intervals contained in the overtone row, only this time the spiraling chords executed by Hayden with overdubs were captured in the massive acoustics of the Abbaye de

Noirlac Monastery in France during a residency in 2015. The result is a long and seductive journey up the endlessly extending harmonic series. The four alto saxophones are here like mediums used to devalue the material and elevate the abstract- yet the endless numbers and fractions that make up this eternally ascending harmonic pattern have something so familiar and comforting in them despite all their complexity and other-worldliness.

MT24 *Sacred Love Sacred Pain* Hayden Chisholm Trio

In essence this is a ballad album. The songs all abide in the delicate space between sound and silence. At times the breath of the saxophone make it seem as if the ocean had seeped into the radio studio. The forms are simple and austere but the way his alto weaves melodies over them makes this recording something special indeed. The longer titles for the respective pieces are all first lines of poems penned by the leader. English bassist Phil Donkin has played with Hayden for over 15 years and he provides a beautifully reduced approach in this delicate ballad setting. The variation in sounds offered by Cologne drummer Burgwinkel on the ballad form is no small feat. *Sacred Pain Sacred Love* stands out as the most painfully lyrical statement of Hayden in this set. The feeling of free fall, for all the uncertainty yet freedom it carries with it, is never far away from the listener.

MT25 *Oracle Hymns* Hayden Chisholm

Since several years Hayden has been refining a solo program for saxophone and sruti box, an Indian drone instrument which he plays with his right hand simultaneously with the saxophone. For this new recording he adds another sruti box played by Evi Fillppou. In doing this he creates "mini-ragas"(as he terms them) which blend two tonalities into one. The result is a series of short pieces that truly sing out in the wood of the old radio studio of Berlin. The title comes from his research into the Delphi oracle whilst preparing for the film *Sisyphus Runs*. In the ancient world, music was always critical in accessing other dimensions of experience. Although many of the pieces emit quality of a lament, the feeling of hope, even when only in the form of air through the saxophone, is somehow always present. Hayden has found a way to blend the textures of these two instruments in a way that enchants and captivates completely.

MT26 *Star Shepherd* Hayden Chisholm Trio

This is the fourth recording in the set recorded in the huge chamber music hall of Deutschlandfunk Radio in Cologne. Pianist Achim Kaufmann, who just before this recording received the highest German jazz award, the "Albert Mangelsdorff" prize, is in scintillating form on this outing. Combined with the gut strings of Eldh's bass, the sound of the trio is a full and robust one- a quality that is wonderfully utilized by the darting compositions of the leader. Apart from the early work *Baumpferd* all of the compositions are new ones by the leader. After the tragic passing of John Taylor in 2015 with whom Hayden had formed the drummer-less trio *Breve*, this trio is set to be the heir to Chisholm's writing for small jazz ensemble. There is much to admire for now but also much to look forward to.

In it's innate and eclectic poetry and truly vast scope, *Cusp of Oblivion* is a the statement of an artist truly coming of age and responding with his own riddles to a world deeply paradoxical in nature.

Ethan Amis

February 2016, Barcelona

Cusp of Oblivion Credits

Mixing and Mastering: Pedja Avramovic, Media Park Studios Cologne

Produced by Hayden Chisholm

Co-production Partners: Deutschland Funk, Swiss Radio

Moontower Foundation

Press text: Ethan Amis

Press enquiries: info@haydenchisholm.net

Extra Press Material:

Audio samples of the Set: www.haydenchisholm.net

Moving Portrait of Hayden Chisholm by Frank Schemann: www.vimeo.com/155141076

Blowslap Recording Video from Deutschlandfunk: www.vimeo.com/154470216

Trailer for the film Sisyphus Runs: www.vimeo.com/153064910

Press Photo Download: www.haydenchisholm.net